

FARRAGUT SQUARE GINKGO
(Farragut Square *Ginkgo biloba*)
NPS Witness Tree Protection Program
National Mall & Memorial Parks
17th Street, NW, between I and K streets
West side of Farragut Square
Washington
District of Columbia

HALS DC-4
DC-4

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

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(Farragut Square *Ginkgo biloba*)

HALS No. DC-4

<u>Location:</u>	17th Street, NW, between I and K streets, west side of Farragut Square, Washington, District of Columbia
<u>Owner/Manager:</u>	U.S. Government, National Park Service
<u>Present Use:</u>	Ornamental and shade tree
<u>Significance:</u>	The Farragut Square Ginkgo (<i>Ginkgo biloba</i>) is a character defining feature of Farragut Square and is significant because of its size, longevity, and association with the transformation of an undeveloped tract of land into a small urban park, Washington D.C.'s first memorial to a naval hero.
<u>Author & Discipline:</u>	Jonathan Pliska, Landscape Architectural Historian, 2006
<u>Project Information:</u>	The Witness Tree Protection Program was a pilot project undertaken by the Historic American Landscapes Survey and the National Capital Region of the National Park Service. The principals involved were Richard O'Connor, Chief, Heritage Documentation Programs; Paul D. Dolinsky, Chief, Historic American Landscapes Survey; Darwina Neal, Chief, Cultural Resources, National Capital Region; Jonathan Pliska, Historian, Historic American Landscapes Survey; Jet Lowe and James Rosenthal, Photographers, Heritage Documentation Programs.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION¹

The area currently known as Farragut Square has been the property of the federal government since 1791, when the last private owner donated the land as part of the requirements for the newly planned streets and avenues of Washington, D.C. Eighty years later, in 1871 Congress selected the parcel of land to receive a statue of Adm. David Glasgow Farragut, and renamed the area Farragut Square in his honor. The statue was dedicated with a full-scale parade on 25 April 1881, the nineteenth anniversary of Farragut's 1862 Civil War victory at the Battle of New Orleans. It is cast from the

¹ Adapted from Elizabeth J. Barthold, "Farragut Square," (Washington, D.C.: Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) No. DC-671, National Park Service, 1990-93).

propellers of the USS Hartford, the ship upon which he reportedly lashed himself to the rigging during the Battle of Mobile Bay and ordered, “Damn the torpedoes! Full speed ahead!” In preparation for the memorial, an elliptical area was developed in the center of the parcel. From 1872-75 walkways were paved, and lamp posts, drinking fountains, and an iron post-and-chain fence were installed. Grass, flowers, shrubs, and trees were also planted during this time. Much of this work was conducted in 1873, when the Office of Public Buildings and Grounds, the land management agency then in charge of the District’s public property, approved a budget of \$5,000 for improvements to Farragut Square. Popular as an ornamental species, the Farragut Square Ginkgo was most likely among the trees planted during this time period, although it is possible that the tree predates the square and was merely integrated into its subsequent design. The earliest document to identify the tree is a 1905 park plan, but because no tree plantings are reported between 1881 and 1905 it is highly unlikely that this Ginkgo originated after the square’s dedication. It is therefore noteworthy as part of the ten year-long process that transformed an undeveloped tract of land into a small urban park, and the city’s first memorial to a naval hero. Today the tree remains, as it has been for over a century, a character-defining feature of Farragut Square’s notable landscape design.

Farragut Square consequently forms both the setting and immediate historic context for the Farragut Square Ginkgo. Overall, the park’s original nineteenth-century integrity is largely intact. The Adm. Farragut statue remains the centerpiece, and although the paved walkways have been altered and expanded slightly, they still provide the same basic routes through the square. The park was redesigned in the 1960s with a \$17,000 allocation granted under First Lady Lady Bird Johnson’s beautification program, but even this public works project did not seriously alter its historic character. At the same time, the District’s decreasing public parking facilities threatened Farragut Square, as proposals were made to build parking garages beneath several of the downtown reservations, and replace the parks as planted street-level rooftops. Thankfully, the efforts of the Committee of 100, the National Park Service, which has managed Farragut Square since 1933, and the installation of two adjacent stops on the Washington, D.C., underground transit system in the 1970s spared the historic park. Accordingly, standing beneath this Ginkgo and looking northeast toward the statue, one enjoys much the same view of Farragut Square as visitors have seen throughout its history, although the trees are no doubt taller, and this one in particular provides more shade on a hot day. Unfortunately, this historic integrity does not extend beyond the borders of Farragut Square itself. During the 1960s, the neighborhood completed its transition from residential to commercial occupancy, while modern construction replaced nineteenth-century buildings. Since almost all of them are minimally-oriented, glass and steel designs, the landscape around Farragut Square and its Ginkgo tree has been completely transformed.

PART II. BIOLOGICAL INFORMATION

The famous botanist Linnaeus assigned the botanical name *Ginkgo biloba* in 1771, with the genus name arising “from the mixing of the Chinese names for Silver Almond and White Nut by the Japanese, yielding *yinguo* (silver nut), which the Japanese pronounced

roughly as ginkgo. The leaves form two lobes, hence the species name *biloba*.² Also commonly known as the Maidenhair Tree, *Ginkgo biloba* is the only surviving member of the Family Ginkgoaceae, and is not native to North America. A tree of southeastern China, it is now largely extinct in the wild, but intentional plantings have expanded its geographic range over the majority of the contiguous United States.³ *Ginkgo biloba* is easily identified by its namesake lobed, fan-shaped leaves. Typically measuring 2" to 4" in length, they are attached on alternate sides of branches and exhibit parallel or palmate leaf venation.⁴ These simple deciduous leaves are green but turn a brilliant yellow color in the autumn, before falling in the winter. In the spring the tree produces subtle green flowers.⁵ *Ginkgo biloba* enjoys a very long lifespan, with individual specimens typically surviving for greater than 150 years.⁶ However, surveys show that some ginkgo trees have been found in China that are as much as 3,000 years old, with at least 180 trees 500 years of age or older. With very little evolution during the species' 165 million year history, individual ginkgo trees are also among the oldest living specimens of life on earth.⁷

Dating to at least 1905, the Farragut Square Ginkgo is at minimum 101 years of age. However, given its exceptional size and slow growth rate, it more likely dates back to the 1873 improvements at Farragut Square, or even prior.⁸ Although obviously much younger than the reported Chinese specimens, the Farragut Square Ginkgo is both physiologically mature and chronologically old. The tree's height of 102', crown spread of 79', and trunk circumference of 142," rank it as the largest ginkgo in Washington, D.C., and well above the average size for its species.⁹ Several of its branches are, however, cabled together. According to professional horticulturists:

² Subhuti Dharmananda and Heiner Fruehauf, *Ginkgo*, (Portland, Ore.: Institute for Traditional Medicine, December 1997), <http://www.itmonline.org/arts/ginkgo.htm> (accessed 12 June 2006). *Ginkgo biloba* was previously designated *Salisburia adiantifolia* by James Edward Smith (1759-1828). See Liberty Hyde Bailey and Ethyl Hyde Bailey, "*Ginkgo*," in *Hortus Third: A Concise Dictionary of Plants Cultivated in the United States and Canada*, revised and expanded by the staff of the Liberty Hyde Bailey Hortorium, Cornell University (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1976), 510.

³ Bailey and Bailey, "*Ginkgo*," 510; Dharmananda and Fruehauf; Edward F. Gilman and Dennis G. Watson, *Ginkgo biloba: Maidenhair Tree* (Gainesville, Fla.: University of Florida, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, November 1993), <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/ST541> (accessed 12 June 2006).

⁴ Venation is defined as "veining, the arrangement and disposition of veins," with palmate veins "radiating fanwise from a common basal point of attachment." See Liberty Hyde Bailey and Ethyl Hyde Bailey, "Palmate," and "Venation" in *Hortus Third: A Concise Dictionary of Plants Cultivated in the United States and Canada*, revised and expanded by the staff of the Liberty Hyde Bailey Hortorium, Cornell University (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1976), 1219, 1225.

⁵ Gilman and Watson.

⁶ Jeffery L. Reimer and Walter Mark, "*Ginkgo biloba*," in *SelectTree: A Tree Selection Guide* (San Luis Obispo, Calif.: Urban Forest Ecosystems Institute, 2004), California Polytechnic State University, <http://selecttree.calpoly.edu> (accessed 21 June 2006).

⁷ Dharmananda and Fruehauf.

⁸ Barthold, 3.

⁹ Overall tree size is calculated based on total tree points according to the following equation developed by the nonprofit conservation organization American Forests, which maintains the National Register of Big Trees: Tree points = circumference (inches) + tree height (feet) + ¼ crown spread (feet). The Farragut

*The main purpose of direct cabling is to functionally tie together the crown of the tree as a cohesive unit to withstand the stresses and strains of wind, ice, and the weight of limbs and foliage. In direct cabling, two limbs at least 6" in diameter or more are connected to each other by means of a copper-covered steel cable to provide equivalent support to both branches.*¹⁰

This work is most successful before the tree experiences a significant decline in health or suffers a major injury. The cabling of the Farragut Square Ginkgo seems a largely precautionary measure, as the tree appears healthy overall. This favorable condition no doubt stems from its species' heartiness and adaptability to a wide variety of environmental settings. *Ginkgo biloba* tolerates most soil types, ranging from clay to sandy in texture, highly acidic to slightly alkaline, and moist to dry. Most importantly, it is extremely urban tolerant and therefore well-suited to plantings alongside city streets. The species is also largely unaffected by elevated ozone levels, and moderately tolerant of the aerosol salts commonly used to melt ice and aid vehicular traffic in the winter months.¹¹ Given this tolerance of Washington's urban environment, the Farragut Square Ginkgo does not display any of the major signs of weakness, deteriorated condition, or structural unsoundness manifested by many of its neighbors, including the Farragut Square Japanese Pagodatree (HALS DC-5).

Square Ginkgo received 262 tree points, making it the largest tree of its species in Washington, D.C. Measurements were conducted by the Casey Trees Endowment Fund. For more information, see American Forests, "National Register of Big Trees," *American Forests* (Washington, D.C.: American Forests, 2006), <http://www.americanforests.org/resources/bigtrees> (accessed 7 September 2006); Casey Trees Endowment Fund, "Largest Trees by Selected Species in Washington D.C.," *Casey Trees Endowment Fund* (Washington, D.C.: Casey Trees Endowment Fund, 2 November 2006), <http://www.caseytrees.org/pdfs/BigTrees.pdf> (accessed 13 November 2006).

¹⁰ John A. Morley, ed., "How to Install a Direct Cabling System in Ornamental Trees," in *Hort-Pro On-line Magazine* (St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada: M. K. Rittenhouse & Sons Ltd., 6 December 2001), <http://www.rittenhouse.ca/hortmag/glynis/Cabling.htm> (accessed 12 June 2006).

¹¹ Gilman and Watson.